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Katherine A. Kendall Institute for  
International Social Work Education

## International Social Work Leader Review

Dr. Nazneen Sada Mayadas (1934–2015)

Ande Nesmith, PhD, LISW

Interim Director & Associate Professor, School of Social Work,  
Morrison Family College of Health, University of St. Thomas  
CSWE Commission on Global Social Work Education

Dr. Nazneen Sada Mayadas (1934–2015) was an international leader in social work who drew the world's attention to the plight of refugees and sparked interest in international social work practice, bringing it into social work curricula across the United States and Canada. She earned worldwide recognition for her advocacy for refugees, especially in her work with the United Nations (UN). A prolific researcher with extensively disseminated work, Dr. Mayadas was also well-known for her collaborations, publications, and speaking engagements held in countries across the globe.

Born and raised in Lucknow, India, Dr. Mayadas found that her work at the YMCA in Calcutta sparked her interest in social work. The organization gave her a scholarship to go toward an MSSW degree, heading her down the path of professional social work. Since then, Dr. Mayadas practiced social work for 50 years, extending her work and interests to nearly 150 countries (Gladden, 2018).

Dr. Mayadas met her life partner, Dr. Doreen Elliot, as a colleague at the University of Texas. It was natural that they would collaborate; Dr. Elliot had overlapping interests and shared Dr. Mayadas' keen sense of justice. They were both heavily involved in the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) as well. Their work was aimed at justice, international work, groupwork, and improving clinical skills in students. They co-edited the journal *Social Development Issues* together. As a team and friends, they were viewed as warm and welcoming by their friends and peers.

Dr. Mayadas was driven to learn and had no shortage of formal education. She earned a BA degree from Lucknow University, where she studied English literature, history, and economics. Then she achieved two master's degrees, one in social work from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio and the other in medieval Indian history from the University of Allahabad in India. In 1972 she earned her DSW from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, where she would later be awarded their Distinguished Alumni Award.

Dr. Mayadas began her academic career as an assistant professor at St. Louis University's School of Social Service from 1970 to 1972. She next joined the University of Texas at Arlington's Graduate School of Social Work, where she remained for 34 years. She was an associate and then full professor from 1975 to 2010. Dr. Mayadas also shared her knowledge and teaching skills beyond the University of Texas, serving as a visiting professor for the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University, Smith College's School of Social Work, and the South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education in Wales. A trailblazer in nearly everything she did, Dr. Mayadas was one of the few female professors at the University of Texas at Arlington who received a promotion to full professor in the 1970s.

Remarkably, Dr. Mayadas displayed talent in nearly everything she did. In addition to her international advocacy and research, both of which earned a great deal of attention, she was a gifted educator. She was awarded the Canada Council Teaching Fellowship from 1968 to 1970, and in 1997 she won the Fernando G. Torgeson Teaching Excellence Award. She brought an international perspective to the classroom that, at the time, was not common. Her passion for groupwork helped create the foundation for social group work practice in social work. In fact, Dr. Mayadas co-chaired the second annual conference of the Association of Social Work with Groups with Dean Paul Glasser at the University of Texas at Arlington. The proceedings were published as well as countless other publications by Dr. Mayadas on the topic of social group work. This eventually led her to take on several leadership positions on the board of the Association of Social Work with Groups.

When Dr. Mayadas saw both the need for well-trained rural social workers and that students from rural Texas often could not travel to receive training at her courses, she brought the education to them. She began teaching across many off-campus programs across Texas, so that students not only benefited from her training but also brought that good work to serve rural locations.

In the 1970s and 1980s Dr. Mayadas engaged in teaching research that was a precursor to evidence-based practice. Much of her earlier published work introduced hands-on techniques for teaching students or working with clients that were innovative for the time. Dr. Mayadas, in collaboration with Dr. Elliot, developed a model for assessing and understanding immigrant integration in the context of xenophobia—something we struggle with even now globally (Mayadas & Elliot, 1992). She was fluent in her ability to always present in terms of different system levels from macro to micro, which appears in much of her published work.

Bringing her concepts and techniques to the classroom, Dr. Mayadas examined the effectiveness of teaching and practicing clinical counseling skills, employing the use of video as part of training—something that is used routinely now but at the time was essentially unheard of. She created her own videos designed to help train students in interviewing skills. Some of these videos are still used today, including one titled *Interviewing Skills: A Step-by-Step Microcounseling Model* (Mayadas & Rodriguez, 2000). This, as well as many other resources she

created, was intended to reach an interdisciplinary audience of anyone working in the helping professions.

Dr. Mayadas was included, as one of only 15 women celebrated, in the book *Women in Social Work Who Changed the World* (Lieberman, 2010) and with good reason. Her international work for refugees was groundbreaking and drew attention to issues simply unknown or ignored around the world. Perhaps the most influential time in her life, particularly internationally, was while she served as the chief of social services in the Office of the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1980 to 1984. During this time she was responsible for social welfare and educational programs for refugees in every country that was served by UNHCR. She served as a liaison to other UN agencies that addressed refugee concerns and was the coordinator for the women's program at UNHCR. In recognition of the hard work and solutions under her watch, her UN office was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1981. True to her commitment to social justice, Dr. Mayadas's UN Social Services Department used the prize funds for programs for refugees who were women with disabilities and children.

Dr. Mayadas was deeply involved in national service to the social work profession, holding leadership positions, especially with the NASW and the CSWE. At NASW Dr. Mayadas served as the chair of the NASW Book Committee and the chair of the NASW Publications Committee. With CSWE she served as a commissioner on the International Commission and Global Commission. She also served on the Executive Board of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups. She was named an NASW Pioneer, individuals described as those "whose unique dedication, commitment, and determination have improved social and human conditions" (NASW Foundation, 2019). It is hardly a surprise that she was awarded two Lifetime Achievement Awards from NASW in 2005, one from Tarrant County, Texas, and the other from the State of Texas.

In 2006, the year Dr. Mayadas retired, CSWE's International Commission (currently recognized as the Commission on Global Social Work Education) recognized her contributions with the Partners in International Education Award. This was in appreciation of the breadth and impact of her work over the previous five decades. They commended her for her years of practice at the UN, which included personal visits to countless refugee camps, as well as her extensive scholarship in international social work. Over the course of her career Dr. Mayadas published more than 50 journal articles, 25 book chapters, and six books. She also served as co-editor of three major international handbooks on social work practice, social work education, and social policy, as well as the aforementioned *Social Development Issues* with Dr. Elliot. Unfazed and unstoppable even after retirement, Dr. Mayadas continued publishing and took on co-editorship of the 2010 book, *Immigration Worldwide*. Dr. Mayadas will be remembered as a trailblazer for the social work profession because of her rigorous research, her dedicated teaching, her commitment to drawing attention to some of the world's poorest and most dispossessed people, and her passion for justice.

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